

## BIG ISLAND BEES - FOOD SAFETY AND COSTCO AUDIT PREPARATION

**ABOUT BIG ISLAND BEE COMPANY, LLC, THE.** The Big Island Bee Company is run by a fourth-generation beekeeping family. Up until 2004, Big Island Bees was a bulk honey producer—the honey was shipped to the continental United States for packaging and sales. However, in the early 2000s global and environmental developments, such as: cheap adulterated honey, global warming, and the spread of parasitic mites, meant that honey prices were dropping, and the bees were struggling. Big Island Bees management needed to rethink their current business model in order to keep operations going.

In 2004, Big Island Bees management slowly shifted their business focus and started marketing and selling varietal honey at local farmers markets. Initially, all packaging was done by hand until they could start to invest in packing equipment. Customers loved the locally sourced honey with its distinct flavors. With its farmers market success, management now understood that a business model shift was both possible and advantageous.

**THE CHALLENGE.** Moving from a honey exporter to a full-fledged customer-oriented business meant that management had to make adjustments to both operations and equipment. Their honey storing warehouse was transformed into an official packaging area and all employees were required to have food safety training, but finding certified food safety training programs proved to be an on-going challenge.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** Management reached out to INNOVATE Hawaii, part of the MEP National Network™, asking for assistance on FSMA (Food Safety Modernization Act) training for their operation. They knew that in order to be compliant with food safety regulations, this training was necessary for their employees.

In 2017, INNOVATE Hawaii was able to coordinate and sponsor the first FSMA training on Big Island. An experienced global food safety consultant was brought in to conduct the training and hold one-on-one meetings with the attendees. At the time, Big Island Bees management was preparing for the Costco supplier audit, and this consultant was also able to help prepare them on what to expect as well as how to approach this critical business audit.

"INNOVATE Hawaii is a wealth of information for local manufacturers. They are able to quickly answer your questions and connect you with highly-respected professionals in a range of fields. Their expertise and partnerships ensure that manufacturers, such as ourselves, are able to stay up-to-date on compliance and certification matters and keep our businesses running at peak performance."

-Whendi Grad, Co-Owner

## RESULTS



Passed Costco Audit and is now a certified supplier



Certified supplier for Costco, revenue accounts for **55%** of overall business



Onsite training more cost effective than sending team offsite



Company-wide training created awareness of food safety

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